

Managing conflict in the workplace



Managing conflict in the workplace is always difficult, but with the right tactics, it can be made easier. Handling conflict in a mature and peaceful manner is a great attribute for employees and managers to have. If you're unsure of your conflict management skills, then it's time to start brushing up.

In this Business Management Daily article, we cover:

- Managing conflict in the workplace
- Top tips for problem-solving conflict in the workplace
- Vital skills and tools needed for managing conflict in the workplace

Tips for effective conflict resolution

Any scenario is better with preparation, and dealing with conflict in the workplace is no different. And since conflict is inevitable, it should be embraced by management and HR.

Here are some important skills needed to properly handle conflict when it does happen in the workplace:

Sharpen up communication skills

Poor communication and miscommunication are two flaws that management can do without. Aside from resolving conflict, preventing potential conflict is much more likely if proper communication is practiced in the workplace.

Don't let those problems fester because of bad communication.

Active listening

Listening to both sides of the story is vital in finding the root of the cause. It might just so happen that one employee is technically correct about an issue, but fails to notify you of some key details that the opposing employee needs to get off their chest.

More importantly than listening, *understanding* what your employees are saying, and taking authoritative action when a change needs to be made is vital. Some management might physically listen to their employees in the moment, but in reality, they might not actually make any changes in their favor. While you may not be able to accommodate every concern, employees will at least appreciate knowing you're listening to, and understand, their concerns.

Confront conflict head-on

Being passive-aggressive about a conflict is the absolute last thing that needs to happen. Failure for HR/management to properly confront a conflict could lead to substantial loss, or even worse, cause harm to an employee.

However, don't confuse confronting the problem head-on with being aggressive. You can still be firm without being rude or confrontational.

Find common ground

Solutions can't be made if one employee doesn't feel comfortable. You've got to get everyone playing on the same field.

One way to ease tension in the workplace is with team-building exercises. If you do a quick internet search, you'll find plenty of different ways to help team members become closer to each other.

However, you can also find common ground in a dispute. While both employees may disagree on the particular approach, perhaps they agree on the end goal. More often than not, there's more we agree on than disagree on and that gives you a great foundation to build upon.

Form a solid company culture

Making your employees feel safe in their work environment is huge in preventing conflict in the workplace.

Neutrality is huge in workplaces that have lots of employees. Aside from the obvious 'no-no's' of sexism, racism, and prejudice against religion, we would encourage you to even keep your political views out of the office if you can help it.

Instead of focusing on the negative, focus on the positive aspects of your employees. Be accepting, and try to build a working environment your employees enjoy and feel accepted in.

Develop sound management skills

Managing a team isn't for everyone, and being a manager requires proper training for success. Think of each employee in the company as a tool — the manager's job is to utilize all of the tools (employees) at their disposal to get the job done right. Ensure managers keep up on their management skills as much as possible to get the right results. And possibly most importantly, ensure managers have time to manage!

Consider an outside opinion

Sometimes it's advisable to look for outside expertise on management. We're not doubting the ability of your employees to get the job done, but sometimes an outside opinion from someone with more experience is a good way to build skills sets and quality of work. As they say, it's hard to see the forest from the trees. An outside perspective may easily be able to pick up on something you missed.

Shape a solid resolution process

Attempting to work out difficult workplace problems is a different process depending on the workplace.

For example, you might find success by taking two fighting staff members out to lunch to ease the tension, but completely separating the two employees from each other might be the more natural solution in other cases.

Conflict resolution skills obviously don't come overnight, but the bottom line is that you need a game plan filled with alternatives for when something goes wrong.

Having a hard time solving the problem? *Change something*

Sometimes, the best thing to do with conflict management in a failing situation is to make a change. Just like Einstein says, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting the same results".

Techniques for unveiling

conflict

Some conflicts are easy to unravel. For example, you might notice two employees having an altercation over the cameras or even in person.

But what happens when a less obvious conflict arises? Maybe it's a more passive problem between the employees and management. Here are a few tips and signs to look for when handling conflict from more passive-aggressive employees:

Body language

Observing employees' body language is a great way to get a feel for the situation. While you may not fully gauge a situation based on body language alone, you should keep an eye out as a basic indicator. If an employee is acting differently, especially if it's out of line with their normal behavior, you may want to keep an extra close eye on them to see if something may be going on.

Look at the numbers

The numbers never fail to reveal the truth. Maybe an employee has excessive absence, or maybe production numbers are dropping because of a problem in the work environment. If a specific employee is less productive, especially if it's a sudden change, that could be a sign of a new problem or employee conflict.

Meet one on one with each employee

It is never a bad idea to regularly meet one on one with employees. Some will tell you things you can make better, and some might even reveal problems that you didn't even know existed.

Nothing bad will ever come out of genuinely getting to know your employees, and managers who have the ability to personally connect with employees while still maintaining a level of professionalism are gifted at what they do.

Conflicts in remote work?

Sure, conflicts happen in remote work just like in the conventional workplace, and more people are working from a distance than ever before. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, [81% of remote workers have experienced conflict in their virtual workplace](#).

Working from a distance is complicated because errors can happen from something as simple as an autotype error that creates a misunderstanding.

Although identifying remote conflicts might be hard to do considering the distance and lack of physical interaction, there are still a few techniques that can help promote a more efficient workplace.

Finding a common focus

Agreeing on a specific set of goals in a remote workplace is especially hard. Let's face it, sometimes it's easier to get things done by calling a meeting where everyone sits in front of a chalkboard.

Luckily, we can call employees to group chat rooms and video conferences — that helps. We just have to ensure that all employees are doing what they should be in a timely matter after the meeting is over, and that's the hard part.

Identifying lack of remote communication

It's very common for communication to be minimal, or not even happen at all when working in a remote workplace.

Although it's good practice to immediately respond to a co-worker or associate, sometimes people don't respond for days or even weeks when pinged about an issue or task at hand. While it's not necessary to address all requests immediately, one should ensure they respond to requests in a reasonable time.

Leadership and conflict are closely related

Let's not forget that with great power comes great responsibility. The more employees you have under your wing means you have the power to make them and break them. On top of all notable advice in this article, we invite any management team dealing with conflict to take a deep breath in, and stay calm when problems come your way. Good decisions in the workplace aren't based on emotions, so you've got to keep yourself under control every bit as much as your workers.

After all, conflict will happen - but it's up to a good leader to ensure conflict becomes productive and not a factor in a toxic work environment.

What have we learned?

We've learned that managing conflict in the workplace is an essential task for management and HR--- in fact, conflict is one of the main reasons *why* both management and human resources have jobs. Imagine, a workplace without problems. It sounds nice, doesn't it?

It's amazing in theory, but unfortunately, the universe always hands us problems.